

“FOR SUCH A DAY”¹

A MAN'S value to society is measured, not by the things he begins, but by the things he concludes; not by the forces he sets in motion, but by the forces he brings to a successful consummation. Anybody can begin a thing, but to bring it to a successful end is the earmark of a great life. Sometimes you come upon those whose day begins with dawn, trailing clouds of glory, but quickly the night settles upon them and they are forgotten. When you try to analyze the reason for the snuffing out of that influence you discover that what they began they did not end and what they started they could not bring to a successful consummation. What satisfaction this day must hold for you who graduate! What you began you end!

Then too, what satisfaction this day must bring to those who have brought you to this hour, who, like Mark Hopkins sitting at one end of a log, have unraveled for you the meaning and mystery of life and have unfolded the glory and wonder of living. It must be a wonderful thing to take a steel spring and a bit of gold and make of them a watch that can keep time with the sun. It must be a wonderful thing to take a pine board, a pot of glue, and a few strings and make of them an instrument that can sob out a Palestrina's "Ave Maria." It must be a wonderful thing to take a bit of

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canvas, a few brushes, and some pigments and stretch on it a Millet's "Angelus." But there is nothing more wonderful than to sit down with life, unravel its meaning, untwist its strands, push back its horizons, and open the door to a larger and finer world. No wonder, then, that when Henry Ward Beecher lay dying and someone asked him, "Mr. Beecher, if you had your life to live over again, what would you be?" he said unhesitatingly, "I would be a teacher."

But all that is behind you now. In a few years it will pass into memory. The experiences of four years will either witness for you or against you. What concerns us, therefore, today, is the kind of a world into which you are entering.

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You are entering a world that is on the march. Our generation has determined seemingly to set up a whole new scheme of things. We may not know where we are going, but we are on the way. New fires are playing in the heart of the earth and civilization is becoming molten again. New seeds are being planted in new furrows destined to bring the world new harvests. New waters are gushing out of new springs destined to make their way to new and undiscovered seas. Everywhere in the world is a sense of aspiration. There is upon mankind the quest for a fuller life. You may speak of it negatively in terms of revolt and revolution which are rife everywhere in the world, a kicking against the pricks and an unwillingness to live within the inevitable restraints of life. But it is much more honest to speak of it as the quest for a fuller and better life. You may not be in agreement with these aspirations. You may believe they will only further entangle and enmesh the world with deeper dilemmas and disillusionments. You may believe that these aspirations of our generation are contradictory and self-destroying.

You may believe if the aspirations of one are to be realized the aspirations of another must be defeated. What will bring gain to one will bring loss to another. But the fact stands that everywhere in the world there is this sense of aspiration.

Not since Christ died upon His lonely cross
Has life such prospect held of a new birth.

Now it is never easy to live in such a world. When the frosts go out of the ground in springtime, rural roads are always most difficult to travel. It is then that ruts are easily formed, mud clings to the wheels, and the travel is difficult. In a world at springtime there will have to be a lot of plowing and harrowing. It is a very unrewarding and difficult time. You may never see the harvests of that sowing or toil. Indeed, already misgivings are coming to multitudes of people and the sense of hopelessness is compromised by the feeling of futility. We seem to be like people who walk on streets which have no foundation, who eat food which does not nourish, who live in houses which do not shelter. We seem to be like boats on muddy flats with never a white sail in sight. We seem to be like sailors climbing in the rigging of a sinking ship, always above the water line, but never far from destruction. We seem to be like sleepers, conscious of the dawn, but unable to awaken. Many people are becoming afraid that a different world may not be a better world. We are not quite sure that change will mean improvement. Such is the world into which you are entering. It is the only world you will ever know. If you ever expect to play your part it will be in that kind of a world. You did not make it, but you will have to do something about it. The question, therefore, arises, how can one live successfully in such a world and how can one play one's part so that a

different world will be a better world and change will be improvement?

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There is one word which will need increasing emphasis among us. Without that word we shall never come to a braver and better tomorrow. Without that word no cause in all the world is quite so hopeless as the cause of peace. It is the word understanding.

It is so easy to play the rôle of the Pharisee, and seeing a world bloody and broken lying by the wayside to pass by on the other side. But you never solve problems by calling people names. We all accent different syllables. We are all mysteries to one another. One drop of dew, no matter how large, cannot hold all the glory of the morning sun. Because I have certain political, economic, and social convictions is no reason why other people should hold those same convictions. I may be right or they may be right. If I am right it is my duty to convert them, but I have no right to slander them or shoot them. Among the Sioux Indians there prevailed in the days of the frontier a strange custom. If one of the tribe determined to travel for a little while in areas guarded by other tribes, always on the night before he left his camp the traveler would be required to sit with the chiefs of the Sioux tribe around a camp fire and then before it fell back into gray ash he would be asked to arise and, silhouetted against the flames, would lift this prayer, "Great Spirit, help me never to judge another until I have walked two weeks in his moccasins." If only now and again in this world we could walk in one another's shoes, how much better would life be and how much more hopeful our tomorrow! The business of education is to create understanding.

Whatever else culture may do for you, always first it

should make you sensitive to the need of the world. To know all is to forgive all. Culture should always lead to compassion and the end of education is understanding. The purpose of knowledge is not to make one arrogant, but considerate; not calloused, but compassionate; not unconcerned, but understanding; not indifferent, but interested.

Bigotry and intolerance are always the inevitable earmarks of ignorance, while the first fruits of education are sympathy and understanding. Education may make you skeptical, but it can never make you cynical. A skeptic is a man who has lost faith in the power of truth. A cynic is a man who has lost faith in the power of virtue. A skeptic maintains it makes no difference what you believe, while a cynic affirms it makes no difference how you live. Education may make you skeptical, but never cynical. To know all is to forgive all. To talk about culture without compassion is like talking about a crooked straight line.

How little one sees of this adventurous good will in our current world! We seem to be baptized with prussic acid rather than with love for our fellow men. There is breathtaking need of a Pentecost of compassion. What hate there is in our modern world! Indeed, hate is the modern American tragedy. It is gnawing at the lute strings of our national life, haunting us like a vise and following us like a shadow. I never knew there was so much hate in the world. We hate the Jew; we hate the German; we hate capital; we hate labor; we hate the old guard; we hate the New Deal; we hate nine old men; we hate economic royalists; we hate the Congress; we hate the Constitution; we hate the President. Young people hate old people and old people seemingly return the compliment. We hate races. One section of the country hates another section of the country. It has even crept into religion, for we are apt to hate a shade of truth

more than we hate error. We are tumbling apart into broken and brittle bits. The only thing we seemingly have in common is a mutual ill will and distrust. Just at a time when we are in need of a common front to bring in a braver and better day the vengeful spirit of class consciousness has gripped people.

I do not mean to suggest that there are no wrongs to be righted. It is hard to justify some things. It is hard to justify disease in the presence of well being; poverty in the face of plenty; ignorance in the presence of knowledge. I live in a city that has seventeen square miles of slums with sixty-five thousand condemned tenement houses in which there live one million children under fourteen years of age, in which there are one quarter of a million family units with sleeping rooms without windows or doors, one quarter of a million family units without running water, and one third of a million without central heating. It is hard to justify some things in this world. One wonders if Dostoyevsky was not right when he wrote, "The only contribution that civilization has seemingly made is to increase our capacity for pain." We have built our world order upon human suffering rather than on human understanding.

But hate does not solve these problems. It only multiplies them. It does not lessen, but deepens the barriers. We cannot hate ourselves out of these dilemmas. Now the pity of it is that men say if we only hate enough we shall bring in a better tomorrow. Men are going up and down the land saying that we are going to hate ourselves into prosperity. In the last analysis democracy is a living together for the common good. Such forms of self-government can never long last or be maintained with ugly moods and uglier tempers.

The world is waiting for the sunrise of those who will see

the ten thousand heartaches and disillusionments of our generation, its terrible injustices, its fierce discontent, its sordid shambles, its drugged sensibilities, not in terms of arrogance, but understanding; not in terms of callousness, but compassion. We have so many architects today, but so few builders; we have so many who are anxious to tell us what is wrong, but so few who are willing to make it right. There is scolding enough in our world without another college generation joining the anvil chorus in the morning. It is so easy to look upon the dilemmas of our generation and say what a dirty mess it is and then shut the window upon it and walk out on it. We need more compassion and good will.

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That was the glory of Jesus. He lived in a world much like our own; with economic injustice, financial disarrangement, political maladjustment, and religious chicanery. Yet He never lost compassion for His age. After two thousand years men are not yet agreed upon the full meaning and mission of His life, but everywhere men are agreed that only by His way shall a braver and better day dawn to the children of men. We all live for something; some people live for money; some live for fame; some live for power. Jesus lived for love. He asked nothing of the world and the world had nothing to give Him. Wherever He went He dragged the sorrows of His generation across His soul. He could not keep Himself out of the welter and misery of His day. He walked with men through their shadows. At midnight it was a Hebrew scholar; at daybreak it was a foundering ship; at noonday it was a fallen girl by the well; in the afternoon it was a company of hungry unemployed, and across the threshold of His home in Capernaum there fell the shadows of the limp and the lame, the halt and the blind, and He

healed them every one. There are three things which Jesus of Nazareth never took into consideration, three things which meant nothing to Him. Geography meant nothing to Him. He never traveled more than one hundred miles from home, yet what He said was for all ages and all times. Then too, He never took time into consideration. A thousand years were with Him as a day, and a day as a thousand years. He never began His work until He was thirty. In six months they had Him checkmated, and two years later He was dead. Yet when He died He said, "It is finished." And more than all these, the social frontiers which separated and estranged men meant nothing to Him. The hero and the helot; the rich and the poor; the old and the young; the moron and the savant, all found in Him something that satisfied them as they walked back into the world with new purpose and a finer spirit. If we propose to build a new order it must be on the philosophy of one who said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Not only is education to be tested by that standard of compassion, but it is also the ultimate test of life. The worth of a man is determined by his capacity for understanding and compassion. There are too few in the world today who are willing to play that self-effacing rôle. Everywhere in the world men want to be leaders, exploiting the tragedies and travail and disillusionment of our time to come to power and greatness. We will never build a new order on that basis. Jesus of Nazareth did not say to His disciples, "I call you to be leaders," but rather, "I call you to be servants." That is different and much more difficult. Moses gave himself with a glorious and adventurous compassion to his generation. He got nothing out of it but travail and pain and a lonely grave.

And yet, no way of life is quite so rewarding. Nothing so enriches life as an adventurous good will toward all people. Great sympathies have a way of making small men great. Because he saw the burden of his people, Moses became one of the figures that will always live. Because he carried an ache in his heart, Dante in exile became the most moving figure in his twelfth century. Because Bunyan saw the distress of his time, he lifted himself into immortality. Because Jesus of Nazareth dragged the sorrow of His world across His soul He became the ageless and timeless redeemer of the world. The surest way to redeem life from satiety and provincialism is to identify it with a great cause. Nothing small or mean can live in a life that is dominated by a great compassion.

Not only is this determination to live with compassion the test of education and of life; it is also the test of true religion. Religion may begin with the individual, but it does not end there. It is not a solitary adventure of a lonely soul upon a lonely God, but rather an adventure in the fine art of living together for the common good. The Christian of the future is not one who has an answer for every question and a solvent for every riddle, but one who lives with a compassion toward mankind. To say that you love God and do not love your fellow men is as anomalous as it is untrue. This world is not a Morro Castle which shrieks with the cry, “Every man for himself,” but the Father’s house in which we live together for the common good. No one quarrels because faith in God brings peace and serenity to the heart. Untold multitudes would crawl on their hands and knees across the continent to experience that reward, but what galls men is that so little comes of it. Religion begins with the individual, but it ends in human society.

If you walk out into the world sullen, cynical, and cal-

loused, you will betray this college, scald your soul, and turn your back upon the adventure of the Christian faith. So it all comes back to this: are there enough of us left who care, determined to live compassionately and with adventurous good will; are there enough of us left who won't let it down; are there enough of us left who won't walk out on it; are there enough of us left who will stay with it to the end of the end until the inheritance is won, until Jesus Christ shall see the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied?

Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues.

JOSEPH R. SIZOO.